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PETROGLYPHS OF ST VINCENT, BRITISH WEST INDIES

By THOMAS HUCKERBY

THE island of St Vincent was discovered on the 22d day of January, 1498. This being, according to the Spanish calendar, the day of St Vincent, the island was named in his honor. At that time it was inhabited by a large number of Indians. Dr Coke states that there were two distinct tribes, Red and Black Caribs.¹ There are many evidences of long prehistoric occupancy, of which the petroglyphs are among the most important.

Speaking of the West Indies, Dr J. Walter Fewkes states² that "not the least significant of the many survivals of a prehistoric race in the West Indies are rude pictures, cut in the rocks and called 'pictographs' or 'petroglyphs.' A study of their forms, geographical distribution, and meaning is an important aid to our knowledge of the origin and development of Antillean culture: it affords valuable data bearing on the migration of the race and points the way back to its ancestral continental home." The above statements do not too strongly set forth the position in relation to this important subject. Tribe may have succeeded tribe in the occupancy of these islands, but the petroglyphs have remained in the same position as they were when first chiseled by the prehistoric artist. Such is not necessarily the case, however, with the stone implements, earthenware utensils, and other artifacts which are constantly coming to hand, since it is certain that many of these were brought by the various tribes when they migrated to these islands from their original homes.

The full significance of the West Indian rock-carvings cannot be realized until all the examples known to exist in the various islands have been carefully photographed and compared with the examples found on the mainland. As a preliminary contribution toward the accomplishment of this desirable object, this short

¹ T. Coke, *History of the West Indies*.

² *Annual Report of Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1903-04.



A. PETROGLYPH, DEEPLY INCISED; BARROUALLIE, ST VINCENT



B. BOWLDER, DEEPLY INCISED; BARROUALLIE, ST VINCENT

article is written. At the present time we propose to deal exclusively with the petroglyphs of St Vincent. On some future occasion, should the opportunity be presented, we hope to be able to consider the other sections of this field. Probably there is not an island of greater interest than St Vincent to the student of the rock-carvings of the Antilles. It also may be said that throughout the West Indian archipelago there is nothing of greater archeological importance than the St Vincent petroglyphs.

For the purpose of the present article the petroglyphs now being considered may be classified under three heads: (1) Deeply incised, (2) shallow, and (3) cave. This classification is followed herein when individual examples are discussed.

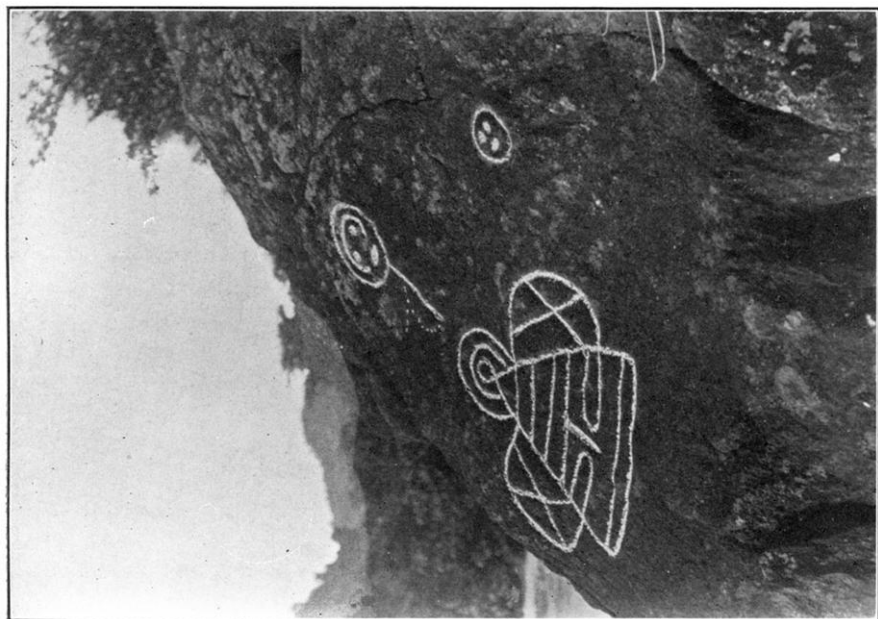
The process by which the distinct types of petroglyphs were made must have been somewhat different. In all probability examples of the first and third classes were produced by means of a primitive chisel; the outlines of the shallow type may have been first scratched out and then finished by friction.¹ Im Thurn states that in British Guiana the deeply incised and shallow engravings are never found in the same district. In St Vincent, the areas in which they are found are separated by only a few miles. Nevertheless it is quite possible that they represent different periods and cultures.

Our notes may incidentally throw some light on the debatable question of the antiquity of the aboriginal occupancy of St Vincent. It is an accepted fact that Indians occupied this island under settled conditions long before the coming of Columbus. But how long? This is a question for which it seems impossible to find a definite answer. Judging from the appearance of the rock-engravings and the fact that the older figures had probably become effaced by the time the later incisions were made, it would seem that man found a home in this island much farther back in prehistoric times than is often supposed. Unfortunately it is not possible to estimate, with any degree of precision, how long a period would be required for the petroglyphs to have become obliterated by natural processes. It is probable that occupancy of the island gradually developed from occasional visits to settled and permanent residence.

¹ Everard F. im Thurn, *Among the Indians of Guiana*.

Another question of importance to the thoughtful student is, What tribe was responsible for these art remains? Generally it has been assumed that the petroglyphs date from the period of the Carib occupancy, but this theory should not be given undue weight. At the time of the discovery, the Carib women spoke a different language from that of the men, from which fact it has been conjectured that the males of the community represented the intruders, and the females the original inhabitants of the island, the supposition being that the Caribs had defeated the aborigines, exterminated the men, and taken the women as their wives. To account for the persistence of the two languages it has been said that the females were the slaves of the males and that there was very little actual association between the two. All this may be true, but it would not satisfactorily explain the existence of this condition over a long period. In process of time, and that not very prolonged, were the theory above mentioned tenable, the women would inevitably adopt the speech of the men. Hence it follows that the Carib invasion must have taken place not very long before the time of the discovery; and taking this fact into consideration, together with the almost certain antiquity of most of the petroglyphs, it seems unlikely that all the examples are the work of the Caribs. There may have been several prehistoric tribal migrations from various parts of the mainland. The large number of petroglyphs of one class suggests that the occupancy previous to the incoming of the Caribs extended over a considerable period. It is probable that most of the Antillean islands were peopled by one tribe before the Carib conquest, and the deeply incised figures may have been produced by them. The Petit Bordel petroglyph is the only one of the shallow type. We are of the opinion that this represents a much later period than the petroglyphs of the deeply incised class. If it is possible to ascribe any of the rock-carvings to the Caribs, it can reasonably be done in this case.

What these pictographs originally signified it would be impossible to say. We cannot imagine that they were produced simply to while away the time. The recurrence of particular figures (see the notes on Buccament Cave) indicates a definite intention. Prob-



B. PETROGLYPH, DEEPLY INCISED; INDIAN POINT, ST VINCENT



A. PETROGLYPH, DEEPLY INCISED; RUTLAND VALE, ST VINCENT

ably some of the petroglyphs had a religious significance. In every part of the world, at some time or other, one of the most common objects of worship has been a block of stone. In St Vincent it is a very common belief that such stones were used as sacrificial altars. This is not impossible. It is a well attested fact that the Indians of the time of the discovery were cannibals. When Columbus discovered Guadeloupe he found the huts of the natives strewn with human limbs and heads. Some of the petroglyphs may be crude attempts to depict the forms of dead chiefs whose spirits were worshipped and whose anger was appeased by the oblation of the blood of human sacrifice. Probably these were regarded as intermediary spirits through which they approached the supreme deities. All the petroglyphs may indicate centers of religious worship.

While many of the rock-carvings of St Vincent are of the deeply incised type, they do not show much resemblance except in the case of a few conventional heads. There is some similarity in type between the central figure of the one at Rutland Vale, Layou, and the larger engraving of the Indian Point petroglyph. The large figure of Yambou Pass Rock (fig. 77), so far as depth of incision is concerned, comes between the deeply incised type and the shallow engraving of Petit Bordel. With the exception of engravings of the Buccament Cave, they have all been incised in hard volcanic rock.

It is worthy of note that all the petroglyphs in St Vincent are found near the old sites of villages. We believe it to be a mere coincidence that many of them are found near rivers. Aboriginal man would naturally establish his home in close proximity to a supply of fresh water; and assuming that the petroglyphs indicate positions of importance, they would probably not have been placed far from the scene of his everyday life.

The petroglyphs of the first and third classes above mentioned are of the same type as those found in the other Antillean islands, and indicate the same culture, while the Petit Bordel petroglyph and the figures of the Buccament Cave point to a connection with the culture of the mainland. The Mexican culture, however, does not appear to have had any influence.

In conclusion we may say that in preparing the photographs from which the accompanying illustrations are prepared every effort has been made to give reliable representations of the actual petroglyphs. Where any doubt exists, it has been stated in the notes on the particular petroglyph under discussion.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATES

PLATE XXV, *a*.—This engraved rock is found in the middle of the Glebe field and is situated about 200 yards to the left of the highway from Barrouallie to Kingstown. The slope of the boulder faces westward. The incisions have a depth averaging about a quarter of an inch. Particular attention is called to the halo of thirteen rays. This figure may indicate a solar symbol. The basin-like depression immediately below the bottom of the engraving seems to be a natural formation.

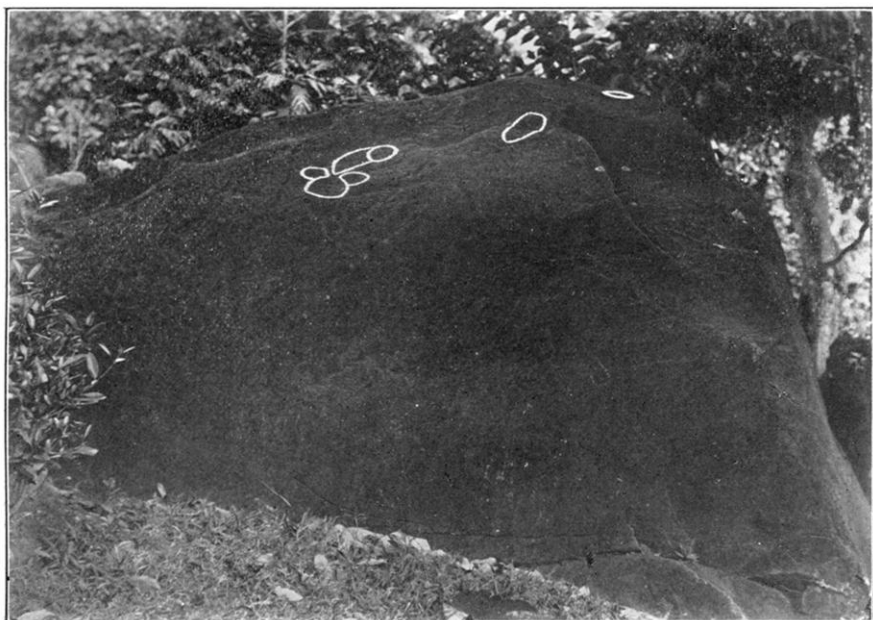
PLATE XXV, *b*.—This rock lies about 300 yards from the petroglyph shown in Plate XXV, *a*. The hollow of the top seems to have been made by pounding, and the incisions used to sharpen pointed implements.

PLATE XXVI, *a*.—This petroglyph is known to the natives of the island as "Jumbi Rock", or "Marked Stone", and is sometimes called the "Sacrificial Stone". It is situated about a mile up the Rutland Vale valley. The side of the stone on which the figures are seen has a southerly aspect. A very old man living in the valley probably correctly states that he remembers the time when the engraved surface was in a horizontal position. It will be seen from the illustration that the river washes the base of the stone. It may be that, some time in the past, the river slightly changed its course at this point and that what was originally the foundation of the southern side of this large rock was washed away. The oblique eyes of the central figure are unique. The cup-shaped cavities at the top of the lines, leading down to the two faces on the left, are considerably deeper than the parts of the engraving. There are indications of older figures on the face of the rock. A burial urn containing a skull and surrounded with other bones was discovered by the writer in this valley. A drawing of this engraved boulder has been published by Karl Sapper in his paper on St Vincent, *Globus*, Bd. LXXXIV, Heft 24, Abb. 8, Dec. 24, 1903.

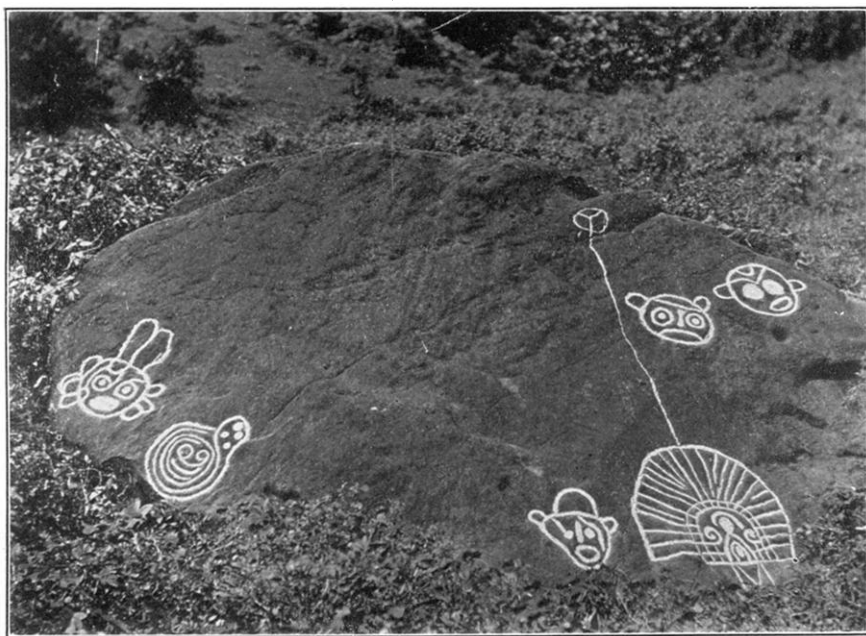
PLATE XXVI, *b*.—This petroglyph is on the extreme point which lies between Indian bay and Villa bay. The rock faces south. The position of an uncertain line is indicated by the dots seen to the left of the engraving.

PLATE XXVII, *a*.—This is the most recently discovered petroglyph in the island. It lies to the right of the highway from Kingstown to Lodge Village. A small stream flows past the base of the rock. The engraved surface faces westward.

PLATE XXVII, *b*.—This engraved rock is found about 300 yards nearer to



A. PETROGLYPH, DEEPLY INCISED; LODGE VILLAGE, ST VINCENT



B. PETROGLYPH, DEEPLY INCISED; YAMBOU PASS, ST VINCENT

Escape Village than the one seen in Plate XXVIII, *a*. The large figure at the bottom is the most interesting; it is not so deeply cut as the other engravings, and the incisions have a comparatively fresh appearance. The representation of the snake is the only one found in the island. The face of the rock contains a fair number of undecipherable markings. Both the Yambou petroglyphs have the rising sun. Attention is called to the cup-shaped cavity below the head on the right. There is some similarity in the formation of the ears of the heads of this petroglyph to Porto Rican examples. Between the two petroglyphs found in this valley is a flat rock bearing a circle which encloses a cross (fig. 76).



FIG. 76.



FIG. 77.



FIG. 78.



FIG. 79.

PLATE XXVIII, *a*.—This petroglyph is situated in the Yambou pass, on the windward side of the island. It stands in the middle of a pasture, which is dotted with large volcanic boulders. Probably the head on the left (fig. 77) originally had two projections. There is a faint line on the other side, and there are very faint indications of other marks on the central face (fig. 78), but they are not sufficiently clear to warrant their inclusion. On the back of the rock there is a face of a common type (fig. 79). The only indistinct line given is the one at the bottom of the monkey's body. During a previous visit we discovered traces of an original mark, but on this occasion we failed in our efforts to locate it. One of the heads is highly interesting: it appears to represent the head of a female; the hair is plaited, and the ear pendant seems to represent a peculiar kind of earring. Porto Rican petroglyphs have horned heads similar to some of the engravings in this example.

PLATE XXVIII, *b*.—This petroglyph is situated on the right of the Woods highway from Petit Bordel to Linley valley, and forms one of the boundary marks between the Petit Bordel and Rose Bank estates. The rock has an almost vertical front and faces the east. Most of the engravings are about half an inch wide and are very shallow. The bottom figures appear to be incomplete. Several horizontal lines are scratched across the lower part of it. It is not possible to say if these formed part of the original engraving; if they did, they probably indicate the process of operation. It may be that the figures were first outlined with a sharp implement and then finished by rubbing with wet sand. The three small figures at the top of the left-hand figure are not very distinct. There is a similarity between the engraving on the right and one of the St Kitts examples.

PLATE XXIX, *a*.—The cave in which these petroglyphs are found is on the left side of the Buccament valley, about 200 yards from the seacoast. It is cut out of the tuff agglomerate flow forming the ridge, which limits the extent of the valley

on the southern side. The cave is about 45 feet high and 30 feet wide, with a depth of at least 20 feet. The front opens into the valley. A large portion of the rear wall is covered with engravings. It was found exceedingly difficult to make a photograph giving a well-defined view of all the markings. Figures not included in the exposure are shown in figure 80, *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, and figure 81. All

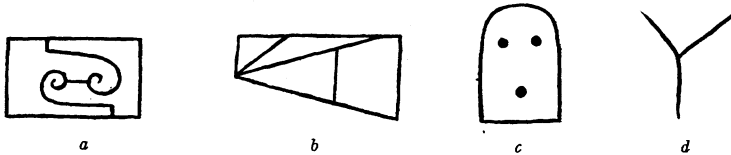


FIG. 80.

the engravings shown in figure 80 are cut in the rock which forms the shelf to the left of the cave. Figure 81 is scratched in the soft part of the tuff agglomerate and is situated a few feet above the shelf.



FIG. 81.



FIG. 82.



FIG. 83.



FIG. 84.

PLATE XXIX, *b*.—This photograph presents a view of the markings found at the entrance of the cave. Some time ago the land in the immediate vicinity was brought into cultivation. The burning of the soil revealed a large number of fragments of pottery and a few rubbing stones. These fragments do not manifest any variation from the other sherds found in different parts of the island. It

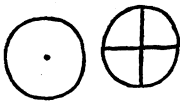
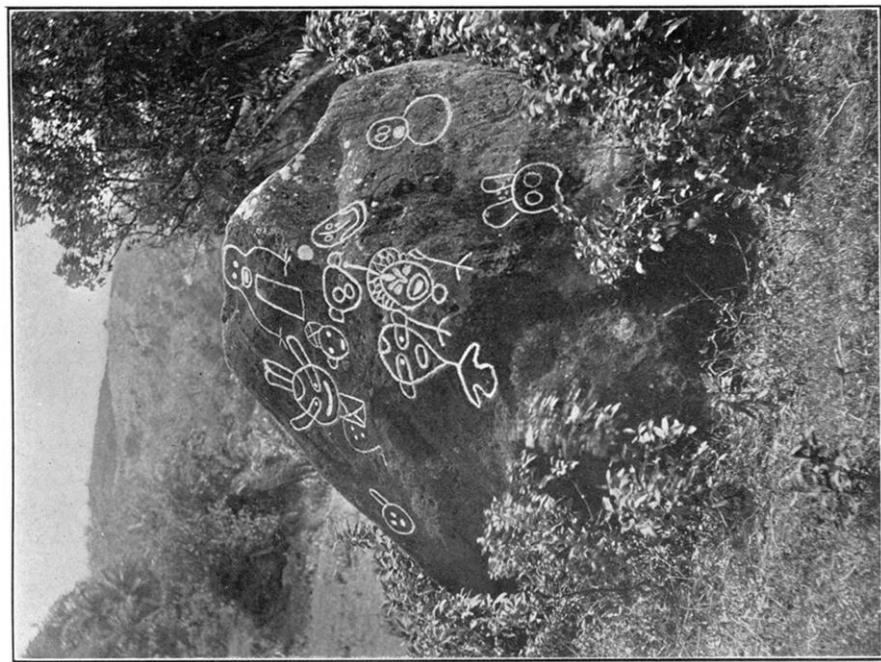


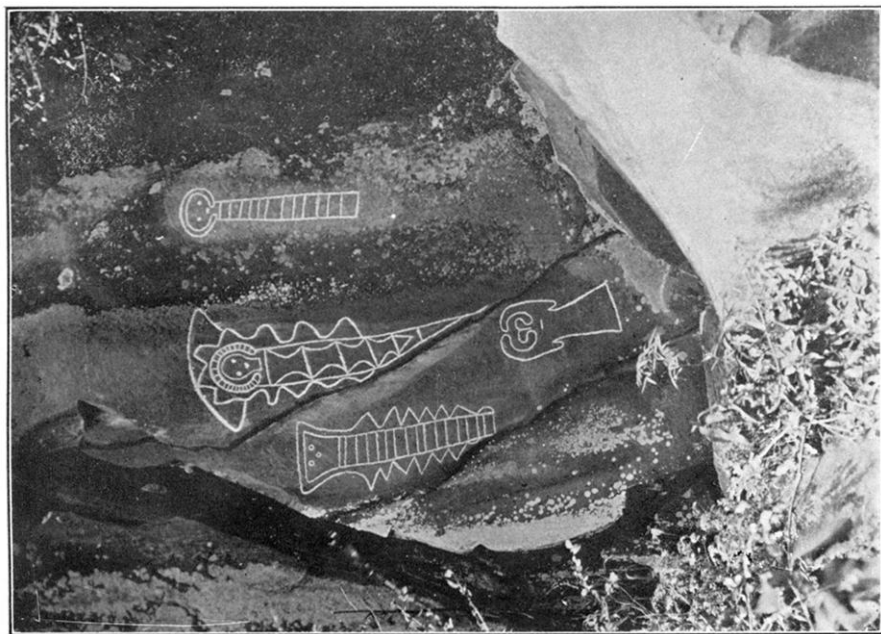
FIG. 85.

may be interesting to note how one of the figures (fig. 82) seen on the right side of the photograph recurs time after time on the other petroglyphs. It is found at Safe Creek, Wyoming; Ojo de Benado, New Mexico; Ometepe, Nicaragua; and at Cachoeira de Ribeiro, Brazil. An earthenware stamp bearing this figure (fig. 83) has just come to hand from Carriacou. The character, with not quite the same curve, is represented at Chicagua Rapids, Venezuela. Another figure (fig. 84) with slight modifications is found on an engraved rock at San Esteban, Venezuela. Other figures of this petroglyph are found in various parts of South America, two of which (fig. 85) seem to be very common.

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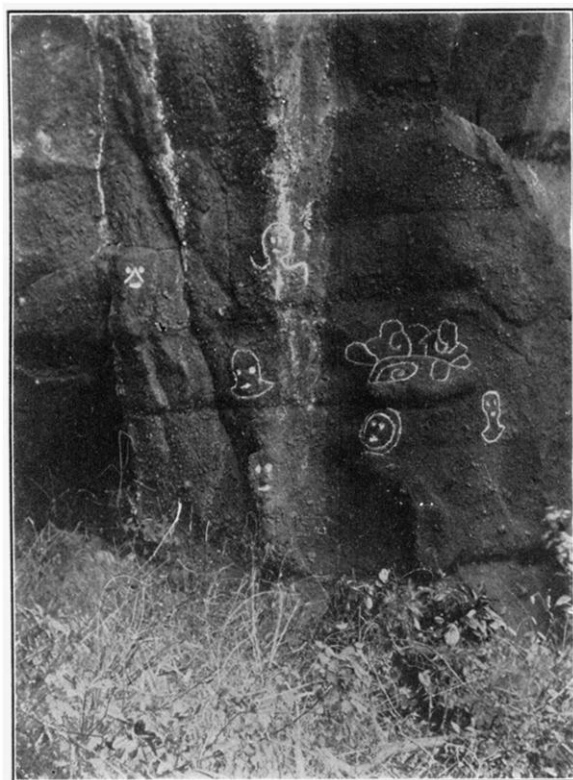
A. PETROGLYPH, DEEPLY INCISED; YAMBOU PASS, ST VINCENT



B. PETROGLYPH, SHALLOW ENGRAVING; PETIT BORDEL, ST VINCENT



A. PETROGLYPHS ON BACK OF WALL OF BUCCAMENT PICTURED CAVE, ST VINCENT



B. PETROGLYPHS AT ENTRANCE TO BUCCAMENT PICTURED CAVE, ST VINCENT